

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

“Caps on – Liquids out” when Recycling Plastic Bottles

Some of these commonly asked questions were adapted from a document provided by the Association of Postconsumer Plastic Recyclers (APR).

I’VE ALWAYS HEARD THAT THE PLASTIC RECYCLERS NEEDED CAPS TO BE TAKEN OFF.

Until recently, the plastics recycling industry was not able to effectively recycle bottles with caps on so the message to remove the cap was created. But recycling collection and processing technology has improved and demand for the recyclable material has increased, allowing for the updated caps-on recycling message and process.

WHY MAKE THE CHANGE?

Two key reasons: First, the cap material is recyclable, and demand is increasing. Second, when recycling gets easier, participation goes up.

ARE RECYCLED CAPS MARKETABLE?

Yes. Generally, caps are made out of high density polyethylene (HDPE) and polypropylene (PP) – both of these have high demand from applications in both domestic and export markets.

WHO IS IN CHARGE OF UNSCREWING ALL THOSE CAPS DURING THE RECYCLING PROCESS?

No one. Bottles are ground into flake before being vigorously washed in the recycling process. The washed cap material is then separated from the bottle material during a water bath float/sink process. The PET bottle material will sink; the PP cap material will float. Both materials are then recycled into new items.

BUT I THOUGHT CAPS WERE MADE OF A DIFFERENT TYPE OF PLASTIC AND HAD TO BE RECYCLED SEPARATELY.

For PET containers, the caps and bottles are different materials intentionally. The float/sink process separates the material so they can be recycled independently of the other.

WILL THE CAPS SHOOT OFF DURING BALING?

All baler manufacturers have included safety equipment such as guards for worker protection. If left untampered, unmodified, and unchanged these guards can help to prevent incidents and accidents.

IS THIS THE SAME AS RECYCLING TUBS AND LIDS?

Close, but not quite. Recycling tubs (yogurt, margarine, etc) and lids (large, flat, snap on) is a relatively new target for municipal recycling, and they are currently in the learning process. The key is the same as for any recycling, namely what does the market want.